

Town Hall
Salem Center, N. Y.

HABS No. NY-4118

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NY
60-SAL
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No. 4
New York State

Historic American Buildings Survey
Wakefield Worcester, District Officer
25 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y.

HABS
N.Y.
60-SAL.

TOWN HALL
Salem Center, Westchester County, New York

Owner:

Town of North Salem

Date of Erection:

1765

Architect:

Unknown

Builder:

Stephen De Lancey

Present Condition:

Fair

Number of Stories:

Two stories and attic

Materials of Construction:

Foundations - stone

Exterior walls - stud and clapboard

Interior walls - stud and plaster (originally)

Floors - wood

Roof - wood shingles on wood joists

Other Existing records:

Engraving - Bolton, "History of Westchester Co." (1905), Vol. I,
p. 764

Additional Data:

<u>Year:</u>	<u>Record:</u>	<u>Reference:</u>
1697	June 17. Royal charter to Stephanus Van Cortlandt for the Manor of Cortlandt (which included the area of the later Town of North Salem).	Bolton's "History of Westchester Co.", I:94-98 & 733
1699	Aug. 8. Confirmation deed from the Indians for land (which included North Salem), obtained by Stephanus Van Cortlandt from Sachima-Wicksr, Sachem of the Kightawonck Indians.	Ibid., 93 & 733
1700	Nov. 25. Stephanus Van Cortlandt died, bequeathing the entire property to his eleven children by will dated April 14, 1700.	Ibid., 101 - 105, & 734
1734	The devisees and legal heirs of those who had died partitioned the property among themselves. Lots No. 9 and 10, which included North Salem, were given to John Schuyler (Lot No. 9) and to Stephen Delancey (Lot No. 10), the latter being husband of Ann Van Cortlandt. Delancey in turn (having become vested in Lot No. 9) devised all the property to his eldest son, James De Lancey, Chief Justice of New York Province.	Ibid., 105 - 108, & 734-735
1744	December 29. James De Lancey left his property (all lands in the Town of North Salem) to his son Stephen. The property was divided into 36 lots or farms and rented to farmers on long-term leases. This area was at this time called "De Lancey Town."	Ibid., 735; Scharf, "Hist. of Westchester Co.," I:133
1770	The building was erected during this period. Prior to this date Stephen De Lancey erected the building which was used as his residence for many years. It was never completely finished as a residence.	Bolton, I:763; Scharf, II:530
1776-1783	The building was used as jail and court house for the detention and trial of Tories during the Revolution.	Bolton, I:765; Scharf, II:530
1781	For two days this building was used as a headquarters for the French general, Rochambeau, and his officers.	Bolton, I:765
1786	The building was converted into "The North Salem Academy" by a company of townspeople of Salem Center and adjacent towns.	Scharf, II:530; Bolton (1848), I:476

In Bolton's first edition of his history of

Additional data (continued)

Westcheeter Co. (1848), I:476, is a view of the Academy. Scharf describes it in his history of the County in 1886.

- 1790 February 19. The Academy was incorporated as the first, in Westchester County, and the third in New York State. Benjamin Haight and 38 others applied for this incorporation. Scharf, II:530
- 1801 The Academy was placed in charge of the Rev. John McNiece and had an enrollment of 80 students. Scharf, II:530 & 31
- 1827 Improvements and repairs at a possible cost of \$750. were made. The engraving shows small porch and dormer windows probably added at this time. Bolton, II:784
Scharf, II:530 & 31
- 1884 June 7. Prior to this date the Academy was again used as a residence. The New York State legislature at this time dissolved the Academy corporation, and gave the building to the Town of North Salem. Scharf, II:531
- 1885 March 5. The building was conveyed by the trustees to the town of North Salem, and has since then been used as a Town Hall and Community Center. Scharf, II:531;
Liber 1084, p. 336,
County Registrar's
Office, White Plains,
N.Y.
- 1937 Prior to this date (approximately 1895) additions and alterations were made.

Historical Background:Pre-Revolutionary Period:

The Town Hall, situated on the main highway at Salem Center, New York, was built about 1765 by Stephen DeLancey (2nd) who owned all of the present Town of North Salem. Stephen De Lancey (2nd) was the son of James DeLancey, who had been one of the first governors of New York Province. The governor had been left these substantial holdings by his father, Stephen DeLancey, who had married into the Van Cortlandt family which had originally owned most of what is today Northern Westchester County. The original grant had been obtained by old Stephanus Van Cortlandt from the Indians about

1690, and was confirmed by them in 1699 after Governor Fletcher had combined Van Cortlandt's holdings into a Manor.

The building was originally intended as a residence. The present plan indicates that it was typically Georgian with two rooms on either side of the central hall, with four bedrooms on the second floor. The gambrel roof, ^{is} ~~while reminiscent of the New England type, has the slopes more common to the Dutch Colonial type.~~ The sturdy oak trusses supporting the roof are in turn supported by heavy wood columns that extend the full height of the building. This is fairly typical of the construction used in this period. This residence was never fully completed by Stephen Delancey and later was used first as an academy then as a town hall.

Revolutionary Period:

During the war years the building was converted into a court-house and jail where many Tories and British sympathizers were sentenced and jailed. One of the British spies called Paine was tried and sentenced to be executed here. For a short period during 1781 the De Lancey residence served as a headquarters for General Rochambeau and other officers of the French army who were assisting Washington. (See Bulletin Westchester Co., Hist. Soc., Jan., 1928)

Post Revolutionary Period:

Following the war the building was used for more peaceful purposes. In 1786 a group of townspeople with Benjamin Haight at their head formed a company that incorporated as the "North Salem Academy" and the residence was converted into a school. The cupola and triple window were undoubtedly added at this time to give the building the dignity befitting a public building. A few years later the Academy was incorporated. It was the third incorporated academy in New York State, only Erasmus and East Hampton being older.

The Reverend Amzi Lewis was put in charge of the Academy, and the roll at one time showed that 80 students attended classes. About 15 years later, Reverend John McNiece headed the Academy, and during these years many students attended who later became well known in the history of the nation. Among the better known were: Daniel D. Tompkins, governor of New York State and later Vice President in 1817; Dewitt Clinton, governor of New York; James Kent, LL.D., and Colonel J. N. Tallmadge.

In 1827 about \$750. was spent by the "company" to make needed repairs and additions to the building. It may be assumed that living quarters for the teachers were added in the attic since dormers are shown in engravings of this period.

About a half century later the Academy had declined and had again reverted to use as a residence. At the request of the Town of North Salem, the legislature dissolved the Academy corporation and gave the building to the Town.

It has since been used as a Town Hall and Community Center. To serve its new function, the interior has been completely changed and some additions and porches entirely out of harmony with the original building have been added on the exterior. On the first floor the old dining-room and kitchen are now used as a library, while a court-room is on the opposite side. The original stairs have been removed and the new stairs lead to the one large meeting-room on the second floor. While the main lines of the original structure are still standing the fine workmanship of the original building has been almost completely defaced by the "modern" additions.

(Author)

Milton Fischer

Approved:

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